

## India-Soviet Union (Russia) Relations with Special Reference to the Cold War

Dr. Anil Srivastava

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, C.M.P. Degree College (University of Allahabad) Prayagraj, India

---

### ARTICLE DETAILS

#### Article History

Published Online: 20 February 2019

#### Keywords

Security Council, Nikita Khrushchev, U-2, Kashmir and Indo-Soviet relationship.

---

### ABSTRACT

This relationship has its roots on the one hand in the struggle against Western imperialism and colonialism and on the other in the national interests and requirements of India in the last twenty to thirty years. The struggle against imperialism made the Soviets an almost inevitable supporter of the newly emerging countries of the world; by the same token there was skepticism and often rejection of Western-inspired fears about Soviet designs and objectives. This aspect can be summed up best in Jawaharlal's words written as early as 1929. The international situation changed radically since then and the rivalry between England and Russia was substituted by that between USA and the Soviet Union, but there were two elements of continuity in Nehru's perception, skepticism about fears spread by the West about Soviet Union. This perception was strengthened by Moscow's vigorous espousal of the causes that were dearest to the emerging countries of the world and was particularly reinforced by its support to India on vital national issues.

---

India was virtually wholly dependent on Soviet sympathetic attitude in the Security Council to obviate the adoption by the Council of the totally unacceptable resolutions that were sought to be moved by Western countries on the Kashmir issue. This was followed in 1955 by unequivocal Soviet acceptance of the position that Kashmir was an integral part of India. Also, indispensable was Soviet aid in developing a heavy industrial complex in India. At the same time Moscow offered for the first-time assistance in the field of military hardware. The offer to help set up a MIG-manufacturing plant in India was not withdrawn despite the hostilities with China and was gone ahead with. This resulted in an agreement signed on 11 September, 1964 for supply of defence equipment to India. It was claimed by the Defence Minister in a statement in the Rajya Sabha on 21 September that there were no strings attached to Soviet military assistance. The supply of military weapons by Moscow was to assume highly significant proportions later. Although this was beginning, in time to come, Moscow became an indispensable source of supply of military weapons not available elsewhere.

The role of Nikita Khrushchev in bringing Indo-Soviet relationship on to a new course and making this relationship multi-sided, intimate and durable was particularly notable. Thus, the Soviet Union began to play an increasingly significant, and from the point of view of India, helpful and valuable role on certain vital issues, political, economic and strategic, which India had to contend with. This role was political, in the support on Kashmir, economic, in helping India construct a heavy-industry infrastructure, and strategic, in supplying India the necessary defence equipment. Notwithstanding certain problems which arose from time to time and notwithstanding the occasional changes in leadership in Moscow, the Soviet policy of close, friendly relations with India has remained singularly stable.

The Soviet Union also became more involved in the affairs of the subcontinent around 1965 and sometimes this created certain problems too during 1965-1967. Soviet involvement in the subcontinent developed more significantly

after the enlargement of their differences with the Chinese Communists. The fundamental rivalry with Washington and the more recent conflict with China, US predominance in South-East Asia and the Chinese drive towards affiliation of South-East Asian Communist parties served to heighten Soviet interest in South Asia in the search for viable countervailing factors.

Initially this involvement was largely for assistance to India. Pakistan's military alliance with U.S.A and the establishment of U.S bases on Pakistan's territory (some of them serving as staging grounds for U-2 flights over Soviet territory) strengthened the Soviet opening towards India, but as, in response and to dilute the Indo-Soviet relationships, Pakistan stepped up its diplomatic effort with the Kremlin, with its major theme that Pakistan had no enmity towards the U.S.S.R and that its gravitation into the Western military bloc was purely dictated by the fear of India and the need for security against a bigger neighbor, Soviet interest in Pakistan and in the affairs of the subcontinent grew. The Soviets detected the possibilities of befriending both India and Pakistan, thereby securing the friendship of the whole landmass of this subcontinent which could provide perhaps the only real counter-relationship to an increasingly belligerent China and U.S dominance over South-East Asia. They knew and realized that India was the more stable and politically more progressive country, but they veered around to the belief that they could carry both India and Pakistan together with them and consequently their involvement expanded.

Pakistan was disappointed and increasingly frustrated over the failure to obtain from India satisfaction over the Kashmir issues in the wake of the latter's conflict with China. The two countries were again caught up in an increasingly acrimonious relationship and the threat of another armed conflict loomed large. The first crisis was over the territorial dispute concerning the Rann of Kutch. Even-handed, the Soviet advice to both the parties was to exercise restraint and to avoid a conflict. The Soviets blamed imperialism for undermining confidence and setting newly independent states

against one another. Hardly had this crisis been averted when a more serious one arose over Pakistani infiltration in Kashmir resulting in the short war of September 1965.

It was then that the Soviet Union for the first time involved itself fully in the subcontinent's developments. In order to resolve the problems between the two countries, overcome the legacy of the last war, and create conditions in which both would be joined to the Soviet Union in ties of friendship and in a benevolent relationship, Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin took the initiative in arranging a highest-level conference between India and Pakistan in which he himself actively participated. The conference, meeting at Tashkent and attended by Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and Pakistan President Ayub Khan with their senior aides, grappled with the issues dividing the two countries and at crucial moments when deadlock threatened to stall further progress, Kosygin's deft intervention saved it from failure and finally resulted in an Indo-Pak declaration and various other allied agreements. Moscow appeared to have scored an important diplomatic triumph, despite Peking's hostility, and to have considerably advanced its objective of taking the entire subcontinent together with it in the international arena.

The success at Tashkent, even though the agreements were soon soured by lack of follow-up progress in any area and the return of recrimination and hostile propaganda, encouraged Soviet belief in the possibility of joint friendship with India and Pakistan as a valuable relationship in the international struggle. Logically, the Soviets felt the need of making some more tangible presence in Pakistan; only then could they expect to earn any leverage with Islamabad. So came Soviet economic assistance, albeit at a much more limited scale than that to India. But Pakistan could hardly be content with that, for its real requirement was military strength against India. Pak pressure on Moscow mounted and the Soviets felt obliged to advance some way towards Islamabad's persistent requests in order to ensure their leverage.

The more important and decisive consideration, however, appeared to be the quest for a sub-continental relationship to counter-balance the breaking away of China and the rivalry with the United States. As the news about possible Soviet supply of arms to Pakistan came to be known, a new situation was created for India. Earlier, Pakistan had successfully lobbied with the United States its need for security against India and by assuming an anti-Communist posture and therefore, assumed to be a reliable ally, it had secured large-scale arms assistance from Washington. Then it had successfully exploited the Indian theme with China and acquired considerable free military hardware from Peking. Now Indian apprehensions were aroused that Moscow too was falling in for the same argument with even more serious implications than their recalcitrant neighbor's tie-up with Peking.

This development was taking shape notwithstanding the effort made by Mrs. Gandhi to try to retain the Soviet friendship even when India had been obliged to go in for large-scale U.S. assistance with certain consequent shifts in Indian political and economic policies. She had made a brief stop in Moscow on her way back from the visit to the United States in the beginning of April, but a more formal visit took place 12-16 July 1966. Reporting on her visit to Parliament on 25 July Mrs. Gandhi said that she had discussed in particular the post-

Tashkent developments in relation to India and Pakistan with Premier Kosygin and Soviet Communist Party General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev.

Mrs. Gandhi had apprised the Soviet leaders of the steps taken by India to promote the Tashkent process and the adverse developments that had taken place on the other side of the border. Mrs. Gandhi found no change in the basic Soviet stance on the issues that were of immediate concern to India. Mrs. Gandhi had been assured that Soviet position on the Kashmir issue remained the same and that the improvement of Moscow's relations with Pakistan would not be at the expense of its friendship with India. Mrs. Gandhi lauded Indo-Soviet economic ties. The Soviet Union had also demonstrated "Sympathy and understanding for our economic problems". Mrs. Gandhi's visit had been preceded by the visits of the Indian Planning and Food Minister to Moscow in regard to Soviet aid for the Fourth Five-Year Plan. Moscow had conveyed its confirmation of the agreements which provided for a total of 970 million roubles (Rs 830 crores) in state and commercial credits for the next plan. "This aid is mainly for more industries in the public sector", she told Parliament.

During the course of her visit, the Prime Minister obviously sought to dispel misgivings about change in Indian policies and to maintain intact the closeness of the relationship. "There must be hard work and sacrificing" Mrs. Gandhi said in the Soviet capital talking about India's march towards socialism, but without being the prisoner of any dogma. We may sometimes stumble and fall, we may sometimes pause to take a breath, we may sometimes lean on friends, we may sometimes have to make hard choices and make adjustments in certain circumstances at a particular point of time. All this is part of life, which we accept. But whatever the tactical adjustments we make, the strategic objective in our struggle against poverty and on behalf of socialism is fixed and unchanging. It is reasonable to conclude that this theme of "tactical adjustments" must have been emphasized and spelt out in private discussions.

Mrs. Gandhi told the Soviet leaders that India's Fourth and Fifth Five-Year Plans were of critical importance in marking the transition from "The present stage of dependence on external assistance" to "independent growth." The key role, she stressed, would be played by the public sector "in metals and machine-building, in oil and chemicals, in power generation, in the socialization of trade, in all of which sphere the foundations have been laid in the Second and Third Five Year Plans." She called for a peaceful solution in Vietnam, stressed the importance of non-alignment, criticized China for weakening non-alignment and making common cause with feudal and revivalist forces in Asia and Africa and cautioned against "neo-feudalism" and racial exclusiveness.

In another statement on 25 July in Parliament, the External Affairs Minister, Swaran Singh, affirmed that the Soviet Union was keen to improve relations with Pakistan, but offered the explanation that Moscow hoped that this might encourage trends in Pakistan for pursuing a more independent policy and might even cease to be a signatory to defence pacts as a consequence of the improvement of Soviet-Pak relations. The article also highlighted the importance of further expansion of India's trade with the Soviet Union and other Socialist countries since this did not involve any expenditure in foreign exchange.

According to a 2014 BBC World Service Poll, 85% of Russians view India positively, with only 9% expressing a negative view. Similarly, a 2017 opinion poll by the Moscow-

based non-governmental think tank Levada-Centre states that Russians identified India as one of their top five "friends", with the others being Belarus, China, Kazakhstan and Syria.

## References

1. K. Subrahmanyam "Quarter Century of Indo-Soviet Friendship", *National Herald*, 20 April 1972.
2. V. P. Dutta "Indian Foreign Policy", Vani Educational Books, 1984.
3. Leo Rose, "Nepal : Strategy for Survival", Oxford University Press, 1971.
4. Arjun Sen Gupta, "Planning for Disparity", in Pran Chopra, *op. cit.*
5. Md. Ayoob et al., "Bangladesh : A Struggle for Nationhood" Delhi, Vikas Publishing House, 1971.
6. G. W. Chowdhury, "India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Major Powers", London, The Free Press, 1975.